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IMMIGRATION—A CENTRAL AMERICAN PROBLEM

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No problem confronting the five Central American Republics is of more vital import than that of immigration. In its consideration the student of international economy must quickly realize that the future of those nations will be materially shaped by its correct solution.

This conclusion is borne home to the earnest observer of political affairs of Central America in remembering their experiences with problems which have been brought about entirely by immigrants. Indeed, their political entity has not infrequently been threatened by developments which directly resulted from complications caused by the immigrants from Europe or America. Fear of intervention, the "bugaboo" of every patriotic Latin-American, is omnipresent and is a factor to be seriously reckoned with in the consideration of the subject of this article.

In connection with the growing interest in Latin-American affairs throughout the United States, North Americans have an interest in the proper working out of the general subject hardly second to that of the people of the Central American Republics. This is attributable not only to the growth of international commerce, but more particularly in view of its relation to the general American policy towards Latin-America. The development of great American industrial corporations which have extended their operations to Central America is another factor. This is due to the fact that innumerable employees of such corporations have found it necessary to establish their homes in the Central American Republics. It will be observed that the character of these men, their relations with the local and national officials of the various republics and their recognition of the local customs will tend greatly to shape the destiny of those countries. The solution of the problems arising out of the concessions to such enterprises, the treatment of foreign investments generally and the immigration of their employees will engage the thought of all earnest and serious gov-

ernment officials of Central America. Not infrequently has it happened that serious international disputes have arisen with foreign corporations and their representatives regarding the interpretation of the laws relative to concessions, and disinterested observers have often attributed the blame to the local representatives who by their antipathy to the customs, laws and ideals of the nation provoked disputes which might otherwise easily have been avoided by the show of a little tact or judgment on the part of the foreigners. In this connection it is interesting to note that to Americans has been attributed the greatest criticism for such abuses. It can be readily seen, therefore, why the statesmen of Central America should be concerned with the coming into their midst of an element which may prove on the one hand a most potent factor in the development of their resources, in the administration of their laws and in the general enlightenment of the people, while on the other hand it may prove a most serious and disturbing factor.

Another phase of this question is represented in the agitation relative to the exclusion of the oriental races. In the light of recent developments the attitude of the Central American Republics towards that issue is as vital to North Americans as it would be to the citizens of the various republics themselves. The want of an understanding between the Chancellories of Central America and our own State Department on this question might lead to the gravest consequences. Fortunately there appears to be no danger of this at the present time in view of the present attitude of the governments of the various countries toward this matter.

The great necessity for immigration into the Central American Republics is recognized where the matter has been seriously investigated. It is desirable for a variety of reasons, but particularly so because of the lack of inhabitants. Save in one republic, that of Salvador, the number of people is far out of proportion to the extraordinary area of these countries. Especially so is this true of the Republic of Honduras. In its vast territory of 120,000 kilometers it has only 400,000 inhabitants, although capable of supporting several millions. Equally true is this of Nicaragua which has but 500,000 within its confines, covering an area of 128,000 kilometers. The population of Costa Rica is but 400,000—insignificant in comparison with its territory of 59,600 kilometers. The Republic of Guatemala is the only exception to this general

rule, having about 2,000,000 inhabitants compared to its territory of 150,000 kilometers.

The wonderful natural advantages possessed by the Central American Republics afford extraordinary possibilities. Nature is so provident that but slight human effort is required to make her yield many fold. With the single exception of the Republic of Costa Rica, which is on a strong financial basis, and also possibly Salvador, the economic situation in the other republics leaves much to be desired. For this condition certain foreigners are in a large measure responsible, notably in the case of Honduras which is still suffering from the effects of financial operations that were perpetrated by a number of unscrupulous English financiers.

In discussing the general character of the immigration desired, it is necessary to consider the kind and number of immigrants that have already established themselves in Central America. This is rather difficult, owing to the lack of a recent census. The following statement, based on official reports is believed to be approximately correct:

	German.	French.	American.	English.	Spanish.	Italian.
Guatemala	7,500	1,100	1,850	1,200	1,100	1,300
Honduras	450	300	1,975	1,500	450	200
Nicaragua	250	100	525	750	200	150
Salvador	475	1,250	250	1,200	600	450
Costa Rica	525	300	1,140	350	500	200

Analyzing them it will be noted that of the foreigners resident in Central America certain nationalities predominate. Thus in Honduras there are more Americans than those of any other nationality. In Guatemala the Germans are exceedingly numerous, while in Salvador the French predominate. A further consideration of these figures will lead to an inquiry as to the pursuits or means of livelihood of these immigrants. The following is an outline of the industries and pursuits in which the various nationalities are engaged:

Mining	English, Americans
Railways	English, Americans
Plantations	Germans, Americans
Banks	English and French
Dry Goods and Similar Lines	French

Hardware, Agriculture and Machinery	Germans
Groceries, Liquors, Hotels	Spanish
Professions	Germans, Americans, French

It will be readily understood that the foreigners resident in Central America have a most vital effect on national problems, particularly on that of finance. It must be apparent that the intelligent co-operation of foreigners in the solution of local problems is of vital importance.

The physical condition of the countries must be considered in discussing immigration, as it has an immediate and vital bearing on the subject in hand. In reality this factor probably exceeds in importance all others, although the kind of inhabitant with whom the immigrant will have to associate, the commercial opportunities and means of livelihood generally are likewise very serious considerations. In Central America is found practically every variety of climate from the hot lowlands on the coast to the temperate zone of the uplands or plateau regions, the vegetation of which never fails to delight the stranger. It is quite natural, therefore, that the foreigners who have thus far established themselves in Central America have sought residence in the uplands which are not only more healthful but where life is much more agreeable than in the hot coast towns. Rare, indeed, is the traveler who fails to praise the climate of Guatemala City, Tegucigalpa, Honduras or San Jose, Costa Rica. Innumerable other towns of similar type are found scattered throughout the hills and mountains, and as the journey to the warmer regions is such a short one, the foreigner finds the highlands the most logical place for his home.

In the consideration of conditions effecting immigration to Central America it will be noted that these differ materially from those of other countries, particularly the United States. At the ports of this country arrive annually more than a million people, the great majority of whom are illiterate and unskilled. Even in the United States opinion is divided as to our ability to assimilate this vast influx of foreigners. The reason for its mention in this connection is that conditions may be contrasted with those prevailing in Central America.

It is safe to say that an immigration of a similar character to that now coming into the United States to the Central American

Republics would menace, not only the republics themselves, but serious danger would in turn threaten the United States, paradoxical as this may seem. Its evil effects would be quickly recognized in its effect on the governments themselves, as the conditions that prevail in Central America would not permit of such assimilation. If an immigration of that character were turned in the direction of Central America for any length of time, there would be serious danger of the population of these republics being outnumbered and the establishment of large colonies of illiterate people would be a serious menace to each of the republics as well as to all America. The problems confronting our own immigration officers, such as the exclusion of diseased, infirm and pauper immigrants, would become even greater ones for the statesmen of Central America.

Happily the danger from this source is comparatively small. This is due in a measure to the fact that such immigrants would find it exceedingly difficult to compete with the native peasant type classes who up to the present time have represented the element which has performed the labor of the country. As soon as economic conditions in Central America warrant an immigration of the character which has had such a marked effect on the republics of Argentine, Brazil and Uruguay in South America, the question will be a far simpler one. The earnest student of this matter is forced to the conclusion that sooner or later the Central American governments will be compelled to adopt methods similar to those now in vogue in South American countries in order to insure a proper development of their own countries. In the solution of this matter lie to a great extent the possibilities of the future, since it is logical that the economic prosperity of the countries will reflect great credit upon its statesmen and the incentive to bring this condition about is thus greater.

However, it must not be overlooked that the conditions under which the peasant or native classes of Central America live are far from attractive to the foreigner. Their ability to earn a reasonable wage is also greatly affected by the distressing economic situation, since wages are very small and it has been necessary for the native to sustain himself and his family on the merest pittance. Although their requirements are comparatively limited, due to the prodigality of nature, education and better environment would exercise a very material effect on this great class now forming such

an important part of the population of all Central American countries.

The development of immigration is to be greatly desired, since the indirect effect which that influence would exert cannot be over-estimated. Consequent to the development of the natural resources and industries of the countries will come an increasing scarcity of labor. The employment of coolie labor which may then be attempted, as it has been in other countries, is fraught with danger to all concerned and is of equal concern to the people of Central America as to the residents of the United States. It is to be supposed, of course, that any contracts with the oriental employers of labor, will be drawn in such terms that there can be no evasion of the conditions stipulated therein. Unless this were done there might result the establishment of oriental colonies in America with the consequent problems which would unquestionably arise with reference to sanitation, government, etc. It is not unreasonable to believe, however, that the difficulties of such a situation will be obviated by careful administration and will doubtless be altogether avoided.

The immigration which has been encouraged, even under present conditions, to some extent has been that of a certain type of workmen, the skilled mechanic, small capitalist or individual with large means. As in practically all Latin-American Republics the individual without means of support during the first six months or year's residence is exposed to risk of non-employment, hence the immigrant should not fail to provide himself with sufficient funds to maintain himself during that period. While up to the present time the individuals who have established themselves in Central America have been largely of the investing classes, they were in many instances upon their arrival but indifferently provided with means. The most successful, generally speaking, are those who have been sufficiently well provided with funds with which to invest in mercantile, agricultural or mining ventures. In this connection a sketch of the immigrant, his purposes, etc., is quite pertinent. The Spaniard, of which nationality many have established themselves in Central America, is generally quite poor upon arrival. The business in which he is most frequently found is that of breadstuffs. By dint of energy, perseverance and economy he frequently rises to positions of importance in the community.

The Italian is of a similar type and he too is an important factor in the branch of food supplies, restaurant businesses and similar vocations. The Frenchman usually engages in the dry goods line, and of this class there are many examples in every large city of Central America. The German may be said to dominate the hardware trade, and with more frequency than any other nationality engages in the plantation business. The development of the mineral resources, the organization of banks and railroads has been to a considerable extent controlled by the British. The Americans have to a great extent been interested in all the vocations mentioned, but especially in mines, railroads and plantations, while the obtaining of concessions for the taking out of timber and valuable dyestuffs generally has been almost exclusively monopolized by them.

The truism that trade follows the flag is another vital reason for American interest in the immigration to Central America. The great business of Germany with Guatemala, the commerce of which is almost exclusively in the hands of Germans, is an instance of this fact. Reference may also be made to the trade which France enjoys with the Republic of Salvador, the merchants of whose capital, San Salvador, are largely French. Notwithstanding the proximity of Central America to the southern boundaries of the United States, it behooves the merchants of this country to bestir themselves if they are to enjoy a proportionate share of the business of Central America; and the encouragement of American immigration to those republics will result in an increased demand for the products of the home country.

Another phase of the problem of immigration is that of the social side, for the natural characteristics of foreigners frequently find expression in their relations with those around them. The German in Central America as in other lands where he takes up his residence, adapts himself perfectly to the native customs and conditions of the people. He is invariably a strong factor in the social economy of his adopted home and the ties are frequently strengthened by his intermarriage with natives. This is to a lesser extent true of the French, while the English and Americans are noted for maintaining their racial and national unity.

Reference has already been made to the misunderstandings and difficulties which are likely to arise by reason of the failure of Americans to recognize the nice social distinctions so clearly

drawn by Latin-American people. The foreign resident, no matter of what nation, by a thorough understanding of the people, a recognition of their customs, and an acquaintance with the language of the people, will accomplish for his country far more than any expression of friendship through diplomacy or treaty. This phase of the subject is one with which the people of the United States are particularly concerned, since by the encouragement of citizens of their own country to recognize this basic principle they will do more to allay the antipathy on the part of Central Americans towards the United States than by any other means which might be taken.

This article is by no means an attempt to offer a solution for the vexing subject of immigration into Central America. It is merely an effort to point out certain facts which are of the greatest weight in dealing with the topic. The problem is one of tremendous import. Indeed, too much importance cannot be placed upon this question. The intelligent consideration by Americans of the local issues involved, of its general principles and of its relation to the United States will do much towards contributing to a better understanding between the people of Central America and those of the United States.